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ARTICLES:

(1) Prime Minister Abe to drop report approving female on the Imperial throne, as debate resumes on amending Imperial Household Law

SANKEI (Top play) (Full)
January 3, 2007

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has decided to discard a report presented in 2005 by the Experts' Council on the Imperial Household Law (chaired by former Tokyo University President Hiroyuki Yoshikawa) that approved female members of the Imperial family members ascending the throne in order to preserve the system that recognizes the emperor as a symbol of the state. This decision came because the precondition for the f the panel's report changed with the birth of Prince Hisahito, the first son of Prince Akishino and his wife -- the first son in nearly four decades born into the Imperial family. Yet, the question of whether imperial succession will continue without interruption remains to be seen. Debate in the government on how to continue the system of male heirs succeeding to the throne will soon start, with the possibility of the Imperial Household Law being amended or a special measures law enacted

Male succession to the throne has continued for 125 generations without exception down to the current emperor. The existing Imperial Household Law's Article 1 stipulates: "The throne shall be assumed by males in the male line." However, in November 2005, the Experts' Council, an advisory panel to the prime minister, produced a report

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allowing females to succeed to the throne. Based on the report, the government intended to submit a bill amending the Imperial Household Law, but last February, when it became known that Princess Kiko, the wife of Prince Akishino, was pregnant, the government dropped the idea of submitting the bill.

Abe commented on the report on a Fuji-TV talk show last September when he was serving as chief cabinet secretary: "Isn't it only natural to be cautious about changing the long traditions of the male-only succession system?" As measures to preserve male succession, Abe cited such possibilities as allowing former princes whose names had been removed from the Imperial family register at the request of the General Headquarters (GHQ) in 1947 to be restored to the register and also continuing the existing the houses of the princes.

The Imperial Household Law, however, does not allow former imperial family members to get their names again into the imperial family register nor it allows any imperial family members to adopt children. The birth of Prince Hisahito, who is third in line to the imperial throne following the Crown Prince and Prince Akishino, is of help to ensure the survival of the imperial household system, but this does not mean to ensure stable imperial succession in the future, so revising the law in some way or other is still necessary.

In last September, when he served as chief cabinet secretary, Abe in this context told a press conference: "I think it necessary to discuss the Imperial Household Law, including the option of reviewing the law, for the sake of stable imperial succession." Following Abe, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hakubun Shimomura announced at a gathering in September celebrating the birth of Prince Hisahito: "It's an important time (for the government) to think about whether to revise the law."

The Experts' Council, which came up with the idea of allowing those in the maternal line to ascend to the throne, still exists officially. The prime minister intends to replace some of the council members or add changes to the council or dismantle it.

(2) Government, ruling coalition mulling a children's ministry to address dropping birthrate, bullying

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Abridged slightly)
January 3, 2007

An idea of establishing a children's ministry has surfaced in the government and the ruling coalition to let the new ministry exclusively implement measures to address the declining birthrate by eliminating cross-agency sectional barriers. In his policy speech at the outset of the next regular Diet session scheduled to open on Jan. 25, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe intends to express his cabinet's determination to make every effort to stop the country's dropping birthrate. The children's ministry plan is likely to take shape as its showcase.

The envisioned children's ministry will be responsible for overseeing: (1) the childrearing support taxation system, (2) efforts to reduce the number of children waiting to enter daycare centers due to a shortage of facilities, and (3) women's efforts to reenter the workforce. The government and the ruling coalition also envision expanding the ministry's scope of responsibilities to include measures to defend children from child abuse and bullying.

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Policies related to children have not progressed smoothly because they have straddled a number of government agencies, including the Health, Labor, and Welfare Ministry and the Education, Science, and Technology Ministry. The children's ministry plan is designed to eliminate such harmful effects.

In the case of Germany, the Family Ministry exclusively handles measures against the dropping birthrate and children's policy, and in Norway, those responsibilities fall under the Children and Equality Ministry. South Korea also established the Gender Equality and Family Ministry in 2005.

In Japan, the major opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) proposed the children and family ministry in its manifesto (campaign pledges) for the 2004 Upper House election.

(3) Futenma relocation: Central government to present as early as next month application for agreement to carry out water survey; Prefecture takes flexible stance toward speeding up work

OKINAWA TIMES (Top play) (Excerpts)
January 3, 2007

In connection with the environmental impact-assessment procedures that accompany the construction of an alternate facility for MCAS Futenma on the shores of Camp Schwab in Nago City, the Naha Defense Facilities Administration Bureau (DFAB) has firmed up its intention as of Dec. 31, 2006, to present to the prefectural government as early as February a "letter for consultations on the use of public property," in order to attain the agreement of the prefectural governor that is needed for carrying out a survey of environmental conditions in waters (of the prefecture). This is the first step in procedures leading to construction (of a facility) in waters (off Camp Schwab). With prefecture having firmed up its intention to concur with the relocation to the shoreline of Camp Schwab conditioned on revision of the government plan (V-shaped runway), DFAB has taken a stance of accelerating the relocation effort.

The Defense Agency (JDA) has indicated its intention to shorten the construction period, including the environmental assessment. The prefecture, too, seems to be seeking a simplification of agreement procedures and the like. A top official in the prefectural government showed a flexible stance about expediting the handling of the procedure, saying, "Once agreement is reached on the revision (of the V-shaped runway plan), there will be no problem," but opposition can be expected from environmental groups and others.

(4) GSDF to establish 70-strong Overseas Intelligence Corps

The Ground Self-Defense Force has decided to integrate its existing intelligence-related units into a new "Central Intelligence Unit" during this fiscal year to boost its information-gathering and information-processing capabilities.

The unit, which is likely to have about 600 personnel, is expected to have its first-ever human intelligence (humint) corps to engage in gathering information from local people when dispatched abroad.

The 70-strong corps, tentatively called the "Overseas Intelligence

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Corps," is expected to secure "cooperatives" abroad and conduct other high-level intelligence activities.

Furthermore, the GSDF plans to create a new category of SDF specialists who will engage in intelligence activities, in addition to the existing engineer, signal, and other specialists, in fiscal 2009.

Although the SDF has the Defense Intelligence Headquarters for intelligence activities, it has no unit engaged in intelligence gathering through people.

The headquarters, established in 1997 by integrating parts of the intelligence departments of the three branches of the SDF -- Ground, Maritime and Air -- focuses on gathering intelligence through satellite images and radio signals. It also analyzes military affairs of foreign countries.

The GSDF's information protection corps, another intelligence-related corps, is chiefly designed to prevent its vital intelligence from being compromised.

As the SDF has increased activities abroad, SDF members have become more vulnerable to terrorist attacks, requiring the SDF to devise higher levels of information gathering and analysis abroad.

The envisioned Central Intelligence Unit will integrate two GSDF units engaged in analyzing publications from foreign countries and in gathering and analyzing the topographies of Japan and foreign countries, respectively.

Its subunit, the Overseas Intelligence Corps, is expected to join advance teams to be dispatched abroad as a precursor to SDF activities similar to the current mission supporting Iraq's reconstruction. It will then gather information from people there.

Meanwhile, the team of intelligence specialists to be created at the end of fiscal 2009 will be selected from GSDF personnel who excel in foreign languages, communications, and data processing, and will go through special training.

The GSDF plans to appoint 1,300 senior officers - second lieutenant or above - and 1,900 sergeants and privates as intelligence specialists from among about 150,000 GSDF personnel by fiscal 2014.

Kensuke Ebata, a leading military affairs critic, hailed the GSDF's move, saying:

"The United States and European nations place importance on humint. I have the impression that the SDF has finally moved toward creating such a unit as it faces more overseas activities. As the SDF can't launch attacks by itself, it would be more helpful to work on information than to have 100 members work as guards."

(5) US Consul General Maher: "We are not prepared to enter new negotiations" on revising V-shaped runway (planned for Camp Schwab), but shortening the construction period is welcomed

In connection with the issue of relocating Futenma Air Station, Defense Agency (JDA) Director General Fumio Kyuma has indicated the

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agency is considering revising the relocation plan, and Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima has hinted that he would agree to a revision of the V-shaped runway construction plan. In response, US Consul General Kevin Maher said that the US has not received any proposal from the Japanese government to revise the construction plan, and he took a negative view about considering such a revised proposal, saying, "If there is a need to rewrite the master plan (for the alternate airfield on which Japan and the United States reached agreement on Dec. 4), we wasted a year. We are not prepared to negotiate a new one; we should go ahead and implement the construction plan that the US and Japan agreed on." On the view of Governor Nakaima to close the base in three years, Maher deemed such impractical.

On the other hand, regarding shortening the construction period, which JDA is now considering, Maher stated: "The US, which watched 10 years go by since the agreement on reversion, has been seeking an early relocation, so speeding up construction is desirable." He indicated that he welcomed the proposal to speed up the timetable until completion that now sets 2014 as the date according to the roadmap in the agreement on realignment of US forces in Japan.

He also praised the Japanese government's handling of construction efforts to date, saying, "The drafting of the master plan and such steps as the cultural property survey and environmental impact assessment are proceeding smoothly." Regarding Governor Nakaima's advocating that Futenma Air Station be in "a state of closure" in three years, the consul general stated: "Having the store open but closed to business (as the governor advocates) means the base will not function. Futenma Air Station must be able to function. It would be better not to harbor impractical expectations."

(6) Secretary of Agriculture Minister Matsuoka inquired about NPO screening, Cabinet Office record reveals, contradicting statement made by the minister

ASAHI (Top play) (Excerpt)
January 1, 2007

This newspaper has learned from an internal document written by the Cabinet Office that there had been an inquiry from the secretary of Agriculture Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka about the state of play of an application for NPO legal status by WBEF, a group related to the Fukuoka City-based asset-use consulting firm that is being investigated by Fukuoka police on suspicion of violation of the Financing Law. The document is also in the possession of the Fukuoka police. Farm Minister Matsuoka held a news conference in Sept. 2006 to answer allegations that he has received 1 million yen from WBEF through sale of party tickets, insisted, as did his office, "I have never had any connection with anyone related to that organization." But from the contents of the document, his explanation differs from the official facts.

Asahi Shimbun sought a confirmation of the facts from the Matsuoka side but there has been no reply.

(7) Japan, Germany to cooperate in environment technology to reduce CO2 in growing economies, such as China, India

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top play) (Abridged slightly)
January 3, 2007

Koki Miura, Berlin

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The German government decided on Jan. 2 to work more closely with

Japan in conducting research and developing the technology that would allow the reduction of the emission of carbon dioxide (CO2) in such emerging economies as China and India as part of their efforts to counter the global warming trend. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Chancellor Angela Merkel will unveil the plan in their summit meeting on Jan. 10 in Berlin, German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel revealed this initiative to the Tokyo Shimbun. The two governments intend to urge China and other countries to cooperate in a new greenhouse-gas reduction framework that would be a follow on to the Kyoto Protocol. Germany is eyeing a joint project with Japan, as well.

Germany will chair the G8 summit in 2007 and be the head of the European Union in the first half of 2007. Environment Minister Gabriel highlighted the importance of cooperation with Japan, stating: "Supporting the green and sustainable energy policies of growing economies, such as China and India, is an essential target for a country chairing the EU and G8. Japan is an important partner which could make or break our target's success."

Gabriel presented the idea of Germany and Japan developing energy-saving technology in third countries, saying, "The two countries will have ample chances in the technology to detach economic growth from energy consumption." The environment minister also expressed a positive stance about joint research with Japan, noting, "Active academic exchanges is one way to enhance cooperation between the two countries." The development of environmental technology by Japan and Germany would definitely be discussed at the Jan. 10 Abe-Merkel summit, according to Gabriel, who also noted, "Germany and Japan have long known for their commitment to environment policy."

(Commentary)

Germany's move to join efforts with Japan to help China, India, and other growing economies reduce CO2 emissions comes from a sense of alarm that the Kyoto Protocol governing a framework to prevent global warming will collapse unless those countries cooperate.

Under the Kyoto Protocol obligating the concerned parties to reduce emissions by 2012, an effort is underway to create a new framework that would start in 2013. The main focus of attention is how to handle China, which is not required to reduce emissions now but is expected to overtake the United States as early as 2009 in terms of the amount of gaseous emissions. In a meeting of the Parties to Kyoto Protocol, held last November, China locked horns with industrialized countries that demanded China fulfill its fair share of responsibility.

This was followed by a visit to China in December by German Environment Minister Gabriel, who reached an agreement with Beijing to begin an environmental dialogue with China. Shortly thereafter, Japan's Economy, Trade, and Industry Minister Akira Amari also visited China and reached an understanding with Beijing to introduce Japan's energy-saving technology. Japan and Germany's joint effort to urge China to reduce emissions has effectively been set in motion.

Meanwhile, the United States, the largest producer of greenhouse gases, remains estranged from the Kyoto Protocol. It remains to be seen whether Japan and Germany will be able to successfully work on

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the US ahead of the G8 Summit to be held in the northern German city of Heiligendamm in June.

(8) 218 candidates expected to run in the Upper House election, according to a Yomiuri survey as of Dec. 31; Ruling and opposition camps to go all-out to garner a majority of seats

YOMIURI (Page 3) (Full)
January 1, 2007

According to a survey conducted by the Yomiuri Shimbun, the number of candidates expected to run in the 21st Upper House election

reached 218 persons as of Dec. 31. The main focus of attention in the election -- the first national election for the Abe administration -- is whether the ruling bloc can retain a majority of seats. The ruling and opposition parties are both gearing up for an all-out battle, as this year will see both the Upper House election and unified local elections for the first time in 12 years.

The number of candidates expected to run in the Upper House election has reached 218 persons, who can be broken down into two groups: 72 planning to run in the proportional representation blocs (where the seats up for reelection number 48) and 142 persons in constituencies (where the seats up for reelection are 73). In part because the ruling and opposition parties rushed to confirm the number of their candidates to run in constituencies prior to the unified elections slated for April and also because they have energetically fielded their candidates in the proportional representation blocs, the final number of candidates may reach 300 or so.

The governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) suffered an uphill battle in the Upper House election three years ago, and in 2005, some LDP members defected from the party over the "postal privatization" issue. As a result, the number of the LDP's seats up for grabs in the election is only 46. If the ruling camp fails to win the Upper House by-elections in Fukushima and Okinawa constituencies slated for April, they will need to win 65 seats in the Upper House election in order to retain a majority. If they fail to do so, Prime Minister Abe's responsibility may be called into question.

Of the 29 key single-seat constituencies, the major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) has fielded candidates, including those it recommends or backs up, in 19 such constituencies.

As a result of reapportionment of the Upper House seats under the 2006 amendment to the Public Office Election Law, a one-seat reduction occurred in Tochigi and Gunma constituencies, while a one-seat increase in Tokyo and Chiba constituencies.

The Upper House election is scheduled to occur on July 22 with the announcement of the election being on July 5 in accordance with the rules under the Public Office Election Law if the term of the ordinary session of the Diet is not extended.

LDP's victory or defeat bar is whether it can garner "50 or 52" seats

The ruling and opposition parties will have a major political showdown for this year in trying to garner a majority of seats, including those not up for election. In order to ensure victory in

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single-seat constituencies, which will decide the game, the LDP envisions a possible replacement of candidates, while the Minshuto is stepping up the effort to form a united front with (other opposition parties).

Ruling camp

The ruling bloc, if it garners a majority of seats in the Upper House election, will be able to build a stable base for the administration, given that it holds more than two-thirds of the Lower House seats. But a sense of crisis is mounting in the LDP over the possibility that the public seems to be moving away from the LDP, in part a voter backlash against the party's resounding victory in the 2005 Lower House election and partly because of the sagging popularity of the Abe cabinet.

The ruling parties can retain a majority of the seats if they garner 65 seats. Assuming that the junior ruling partner New Komeito retains the seats up for election, 52 seats will be the LDP's victory or defeat bar. If the LDP wins victories in the Upper House by-elections in Fukushima and Okinawa constituencies in April, the win or lose bar will drop to 50.

Single-seat constituencies number 29, the largest figure ever. The reapportionment of the seats created new single-seat constituencies in Tochigi and Gunma Prefectures. In the 2001 Upper House election, the LDP won victories in 25 of the 27 single-seat constituencies, but in the 2004 Upper House election, the number of such constituencies the LDP won victories was only 14.

The LDP puts up veterans in single-seat constituencies, but this gives rise to the concern in the party that if the Minshuto puts up young candidates in those constituencies, LDP candidates would have an uphill battle. Prime Minister Abe even eyes the possibility of replacing those candidates, noting: "We must put up better candidates." But the LDP's local chapters are opposing such replacement.

The New Komeito aims to get five candidates it fields in Tokyo, Saitama, Kanagawa, Aichi, and Osaka constituencies, all elected. In the proportional representation blocs, the party aims to collect more than the 8,620,000 votes it gained in the 2004 Upper House election.

Opposition parties

The Minshuto wants to rock the ruling parties by forcing them to lose a majority of the seats so that the Lower House election timetable will be moved up. While the party aims to win 50 seats, President Ozawa states, "We will build a system of winning victories in 15 or more or a half of the single-seat constituencies." The Minshuto has already determined candidates it will recommend or back up in 19 single-seat constituencies. The party emphasizes the importance of forming a united front with other opposition parties. In the Toyama and Akita constituencies, the Minshuto and the minor opposition Social Democratic Party (SDP) have jointly backed the same candidates. In Okinawa, the Minshuto aims to form a unified front with other opposition parties including the Japanese Communist Party (JCP).

The Minshuto is on the offensive by fielding two candidates in multiple-seat constituencies, such as Tokyo and Aichi.

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For the JCP, the SDP, and the People's New Party, winning more seats than the ones they respectively held before the election is their common goal.

(9) TOP HEADLINES

Asahi:

Mizutani illicitly paid 1.5 billion yen to lawmakers' secretaries and gangsters to win contract bids for projects at Kansai and Chubu airports

Mainichi:

Russian vice foreign minister: "Russia settled three controversial islets with China by dividing them two equal parts"; Japan, Russia may come up with new formula to settle Northern Territories issue

Yomiuri:

Path to revitalization of Japan (Part 1): Aesthetics adrift

Nihon Keizai:

Buy-out fund exceeding 4 trillion yen cautious about hostile takeovers

Sankei:

Prime Minister Abe to disregard Imperial House Law panel's recommendation for matrilineal emperor system

Tokyo Shimbun:

Japan, Germany to cooperate in environment technology to reduce CO2 in growing economies, such as China, India

Akahata:

18 LDP, DPJ lawmakers appropriated over 10 million yen each as "expenses for offices" in Dietmembers' Office Building in 2005

(10) EDITORIALS

Asahi:

(1) Long- and short-term perspective required in determining what must be passed to future generations

Mainichi:

(1) Theatrical politics no longer needed

Yomiuri:

(1) Map out strategies for international crises

Nihon Keizai:

(1) Management reforms essential by overcoming allergy to foreign capital

Sankei:

(1) Security of Japan: Time to review exclusively defense-oriented policy to be fully prepared against North's nuclear threat

Tokyo Shimbun:

(1) New Year's thoughts: Memories of cities must be cherished

Akahata:

(1) Turning point for inhumane economy

DONOVAN